Growing Herbs

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Herb or `erb?

- Controversy
- Comes from Latin herba.
- Oxford dictionary h was pronounced.
- Dropped in late Latin and romance languages.
- English picked it back up again.
- Americans dropped the H.
- Doesn’t matter! Either is correct.
What is an Herb?

• An herbaceous plant that displays one or more of the following characteristics:
  • Grown for food.
  • Used for fragrance or decoration.
  • To dye plants.
  • Medicinally.

• Any plant cultivated or harvested for an interesting or unusual quality.
Why Grow Herbs

- Look and smell the same as they did ages ago.
- Much allure is antiquity.
- Comfort in the old things.
- Sensory experience.
- Visual appeal.
- Fragrances and flavors are pleasurable.
- Yields textures and sounds.
- Outgrowth of fascination with good food and how to prepare.
- Desire to decorate and scent home.
- Wish to dye plants.
- To heal common ailments.
Herbs in Eastern Virginia

- Challenging!
- Wide fluctuations in temperature. 70’s to 20’s at night.
- Winter months - with ice and winds - harsh.
- Summer rains and humidity. Need to treat some as annuals.
Growing Herbs

• Mediterranean area.
• Rocky soil – hot dry conditions.
• Tolerate total neglect.
• Can grow here despite high humidity.
• Planted after last frost date in spring.
Location

- Full sun-4-5 hours a day.
- Water drains well in area. No standing water.
- One requirement for all herbs- good drainage.
- Herbs DO NOT like wet feet.
- Raised beds are a good solution.
- Allow plenty of space for herbs mature size.
Soil

• Good preparation is vital.
• Prepare the area thoroughly.
• Soil test.
• pH of 6.3-7.0.
• Dig soil to a depth of 12”.
• Eastern Exposure
• Incorporate lime, coarse builder’s sand, aged manure, peat moss and compost.
Planting

• Lift plant out of pot, spread out roots before putting in the ground.
• Place plant into soil.
• Cover well and water until water no longer drains.
• Add a little compost or organic fertilizer. fish emulsion Mulch plants.
• Don’t over crowd plants.
Watering

- Unnecessary if regular rains.
- Drought- or extremely hot temperatures- water every 4-5 days.
- Do not over water!
- Susceptible to root rot.
Fertilizing

- Do not need much.
- If soil is not good quality, may need to fertilize or add compost.
- Slow release fertilizer
Mulching

• Very important to hold in moisture in the summer.
• Protects herbs from temp. fluctuations in winter.
• Grass clippings - pine straw.
• Sand or gravel for gray leafed herbs.
• Heat radiating up from sand keep underside of the plant hot and dry.
Pruning

- Pinch, prune and harvest.
- Meant to be used.
- Keep flowers pinched off.
- Keeps herbs healthy and bush.
- Don’t prune more that 1/3 of herb a year.
- Use pinched herbs in crafts and cooking.
Insects

- Rarely seen on outdoor plants.
- Spittlebugs on Rosemary.
- Use strong spray of water.
- Insecticidal soap.
Growing Herbs in Containers

• More maintenance that in the ground.
• Just as satisfying.
• Can come in in the winter.
Basic Requirements

• Containers- deep enough for plant roots and have drainage holes.
• Grow fast- check for repotting.
• Clay better that plastic or ceramic.
Basic Requirements

- **Soil** - Well drained and porous. Crushed oyster shells.
- Mix of loam, sand, lime, peat. etc.
- **Planting** – water before. Clean container.
- Place gravel in bottom
- Loosen plant from old pot gently and place in container, fill with soil.
- Leave room on top for water.
Basic Requirements

• Watering- more that in ground. Dries out quicker.
• Water thoroughly until saturated and water runs through drainage holes. Less in winter.
• Fertilizer- More often because of water leaching.
• Weak - time release fertilizer.
Basic Requirements

• Sun- outside- at least half days sun-
• Winter -if inside south facing window.
• Artificial lights.
Basic Requirements

• Insects- outside- rare
• When bringing them in – spray with water- strong spray- insecticidal soap.
• Scale, spider mites, whitefly.
• Mealybugs- rubbing alcohol.
• Spray up to harvest but wash well!!
• Allow plenty of air circulation inside. Add extra humidity.
Propagation

- **Division** - chives, oregano, yarrow, mints
- **Stem Cuttings** - Rosemary, Oregano
- Salvia varieties, Lemon verbena, Wormwood, Scented Geraniums, Santolina, Thyme varieties, Marjoram, French tarragon
- **Seeds** - basil, dill
- **Layering**
A Few Hints

• Plant close to house
• Plant close to water source if containers
• Plant next to walkways to rub against.
Basil

- Annual 12-36” tall sun
- Sweet,
- African Blue (not culinary)
- Cinnamon
- Mrs. Burns Lemon
- Red rubin
- Green pepper basil
- Pinch back 1/3
Bay Laurel

- Laurus nobilis
- Noble herb
- Garlands to adore poets.
- 25ft tall.
- Protect from winter winds.
Borage officinalis
• Annual to 3ft.
• Star shaped blue flowers-edible.
Courage-
• Makes one merry!
• Use in place of cucumbers.
Catnip (mint)

- Perennial 3 ft tall. Grey-green leaves - blue flowers
- Cats love it.
Chervil

- Cold weather herb-dies back in summer
- Garnishes, salads
- Similar tasting to parsley or aniseed.
Chives

- Garlic and onion
- Flower heads are edible.
- dressings
Coriander/ Cilantro

• Cold weather herb- see it in the spring and fall- dies back in summer.
• Seeds-coriander
• Leaves cilantro- salsas
Dill

- Cold weather herb - see it in the spring and fall - dies back in summer.
- Easy to seed and spread quickly.
- Will reseed readily.
Fennel

- Foeniculum vulgare
- Green, bronze
- Butterfly larvae
Lavender

- Lavendins- cross between French and English better for tidewater.
- Heartier
- Dutch
- Provence
- Grosso
- Fat spike
- Seal
Lemon Balm

- Variegated and green forms
- mint family
- may need to be contained...
Lemon Verbena

- Best lemony taste
- Many uses-
- 4-5 ft tall.
- May not winter over.
Lovage

- hardy perennial
- resemble those of celery. The leaves are stronger tasting, but sweeter than celery.
- propagated from seed planted in late summer.
- leaves and stems give a celery flavor to soups and salads.
Marjoram

- *Origanum majorana*
- Same genus as oregano.
- Not as hardy.
- Milder flavor.
Marvelous Mints

- Menta species
- Peppermint
- Orange mint
- Kentucky colonel spearmint
- Red stem Apple mint (true Menta gracilis)
- Pineapple
Oregano

- Greek mountain (sp.hirtum)
- Italian oregano
- herranhausen
Parsley

- Flat leaf Italian
- Curly
- Larvae food source
Rosemary

- Rosmarinus officinalis
- Hill Hardy
- Arp
- Salem
- Mrs. Reed’s dark blue
- Severn Seas
- Miss jessup
- Nancy Howard
- Tuscan blue
Sage

• Salvia officinalis
• Common
• Berggarten
• Purple
• Golden
• Tricolor
• Pineapple
Salad Burnett

• Perennial
• leaves taste much like cucumber.
• Can be used whole in salads or chopped into soups and other dishes.
Savory

- *Satureja* species
- Summer (annual)
- Winter (perennial)
- To 2 ft tall.
- Bold and peppery flavor
Scented Pelargoniums

- Geraniums
- Frensham’s lemon
- apple
- Coconut
- Attar of roses
- Mabel grey (lemon)
- Old fashioned rose
- Peppermint
- Chocolate
- Atomic snowflake
Tarragon

- Tagetes lucida
  Mexican mint marigold
- Too humid for *Artemisia dracunculus* var. *sativa*
- French tarragon
Thyme

- French
- Provencal
- Lemon (green and variegated)
- English
- Oregano
- Orange balsam
- Wooly- (not culinary)
Landscaping with Herbs
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• Formal layouts
Landscaping with Herbs

• formal
Landscaping with Herbs

• informal
Themes

• Kitchen/Culinary
• Fragrant
• Medicinal
• Drying
• Crafts
• Dye garden
Harvesting Herbs

- **When** - Cut on dry day- sunny morning after the dew has burned off of the leaves but before the sun gets too hot.
- Use herbs that are just starting to bud-before flowering.

- **How** - Leave most of the stem on when cutting herbs and remove tough leaves growing lower than 6 inches on the stalk.
Harvesting Herbs

- Should be from tender flavorful leaves from upper 6 inches of stalk or newer growth. Take off blossom heads.

- **Why**- These leaves have the most oil, which gives the aroma and flavor.
How to Harvest

- Use a sharp knife or scissors to cut large stems or branches from mature plants.
- Shake to remove any critters... examine leaves and remove any old, damaged, bruised or diseased leaves.
- Rinse branches (if dirty) in cold water, drain and blot dry with a paper towels or a single layer of cheesecloth.
- Turn branches upside down and remove leaves along stem or dry then remove stem.
Harvesting Herbs

• Herbs grown for foliage- harvest before they flower.
• Seeds- as seed pods change in color from green to brown to gray- before they shatter.
• Roots- in the fall after foliage fades-
• Examples- Chicory, ginseng and goldenseal.
Harvesting Herbs

• Annuals can be harvested until frost.
• Perennial herbs until late August.
• Harvest tarragon or lavender flowers in early summer then shear to half its height for second blooming in fall.
Different Methods of Drying

• Air-dried. Easiest and most inexpensive.
• Herbs are tied in bunches (5-6 stems) with string or with elastics and hung upside down in a well ventilated, dust free place to dry.
• Keep out of the sun.
Air Drying Herbs

- Place in dry SHADY place until the leaves are so dry that they crumble when handled.
- Herbs dried in the shade have better color and flavor than sun dried herbs.
- Sun will bleach color, smell and flavor from the herbs.
Air Drying Herbs

• Check weekly – should be brittle enough to break between fingers.
• Check after one week, then weekly.…. 

• Herbs suited for air drying-sturdy- sage, thyme, summer savory, dill, bay leaves, oregano, rosemary, parsley and marjoram.
Drying Racks

• Trays or shelves to lay herbs out flat..
• Spread stems out and turn daily to allow to dry properly.
• Can use screens, between sheets of newspaper or muslin.
• Keep out of direct sunlight.
• Herbs to shelf dry (higher moisture content)-basil, tarragon, lemon balm,
• mints – mold if not dried quickly…
Different Methods of Drying

- **Dehydrators** - useful if drying large quantities of herbs or high moisture herbs such as basil.
- Follow directions with dehydrator.
- **Microwave Ovens** - last resort!!!
- Can dry small batches.
- Place 4 or 5 herbs stalks with leaves between paper towels.
- Microwave on high for 1 minute.
- Check herbs for dryness.
- Repeat if needed.
- Cook herbs - not much oils left…
Oven Drying

• Works better for some herbs in areas with high humidity.
• Place on cookie sheet without allowing leaves to touch and place in a warm oven until herbs are light and brittle.
• Ideal oven temperatures -110 degree-130 degrees.
Drying Roots

- Some need to be peeled first.
- Examples- Licorice, horseradish and marshmallow root.
- Dandelion and angelica need skin on.
- Cut roots into ½ inch slices and lay in racks or screens.
- Takes much longer to dry out- 5-6 weeks.
- Check often.
- When slices are light and brittle - ready for storage.
- Place in airtight tin or glass jars.
Drying Lavender

- Pick flower heads when closed and the top florets have just burst.
- Contains the highest concentration of oils.
- Spread the complete head on a tray to dry. Turn head often to make sure all parts are dry.
- Or bunch and hang upside down.
- Strip the separate flower heads from the stems – dry to use for pot-pourri.
Freezing Herbs

• Can be placed inside a small freezer bag or airtight container (canning jar) in the freezer. When ready - crumble into recipes.

• Spread out on cookie sheets or jelly roll pan. When frozen - pack in air tight containers.

• Place fresh herbs in water in ice cube trays and freeze them.
Freezing Herbs

• Will lose some flavor but ready to use.
• Pop in soups, stews and sauces.
• Not suitable for garnishing- becomes limp when thawed…do not refreeze herbs.
• Chives- great for freezing. Parsley, sage, tarragon.
Storing Dried Herbs

- Dry when brittle and crumb easily.
- Store in small airtight containers away from the light.
- Plastic bags or jars.
- Label and date each container.
- Store in cool, dry, dark place.
Storing Dried Herbs

- Can keep for 3-4 years but best if used within a year.
- Flavor diminishes with age.
- To release full flavor, crush whole herb leaves just before adding to recipe.
- Add to soups and stews the last half hour of cooking.
Enjoy your Herbs!

- Go out and plant grow, harvest enjoy your herbs!
- Any Questions????

- Thank- You!
Resources

- http://www.herbsociety.org/
- Michigan State University Extension
- http://www.herbsociety.co.uk
- http://solutions.psu.edu/Food_Preparation_Safety_Storage.htm
- Web.extension.uiuc.edu
- www.ces.ncsu.edu
- http://hgic.clemson.edu
- http://www.urbanext.uiuc.edu
- www.extension.umn.edu